Our next appearance will be at ANE 2025!

A Furry Guide to Covid Safety

How to Make Cons Safer and More Inclusive

Last updated January 14, 2023.

> This guide ended up being longer than I originally envisioned it, but I tried my best to keep it as short as possible while covering all the bases.
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> The first half covers specific mitigations (vaccines, masks, testing, and air quality), which is information you might have already learned elsewhere.
>
> The second half covers how to navigate risk together with friends and deal with scenarios you're likely to encounter while at a con.
>
> Please send any feedback, suggestions, or questions my way! —*yatchi<3*

Principles

- **Inclusivity** is at the core of furry, and COVID safety is an important part of being inclusive. Think about vulnerable populations, people with vulnerable family members,

people who can't afford to get sick, or people who don't want to risk Long COVID. Many furries (perhaps even a majority) fall into one or more of these categories, and they want to attend and see their friends just as much as everyone else. Let's help each other out so we can all have a good time.

- While vaccines have done a phenomenal job at reducing death and severe illness, they have not eliminated them, nor have they eliminated the risk of Long COVID. What's more, each new infection means a new opportunity for a mutation, which could lead to strains that are even harder to control. Therefore, our goal should be to **reduce infections using *all* of the tools we have**, beyond just vaccines.
- You have multiple tools at hand, and many opportunities to use them. Even if you're not 100% perfect 100% of the time, **please do what you can, when you can**. We can't stop every infection, but we can stop some of them, and that's very much worth doing for our friends and our communities.

Vaccines

- The bivalent boosters, which target both the original COVID virus and a newer strain, were made available in August 2022. Immunity wanes over time, so make sure you get boosted so that your immune system is ready, especially if it's been a long time since your most recent shot.
- Uptake of the bivalent booster in the US has been abysmal (about 13% of those eligible, as of December 2022). Encourage your friends to get boosted before the con. Consider requiring booster cards for room parties.

Masks

- People who mask often feel excluded by people who don't, so make the effort to make them feel included. Never shame or tease someone for wearing a mask. If you have questions, do so respectfully, and make sure they understand that you're doing so out of respect.
- Ask people what their mask policy is. Be honest and courageous about what will make you feel comfortable. If you see someone wearing a mask, consider putting your own on proactively without having to ask.
- N95s and similar masks (KN95, KF94, FFP2, etc.) offer **good** protection to yourself and others; everyone should try to find one that works well for them. Surgical masks offer **okay** protection. Cloth masks, such as furry printed masks, offer **poor** protection, but

they can often be worn over other masks to improve fit or aesthetics, and they are still more protective than no mask at all.
- For the hardcore, elastomeric masks (P100), when properly fitted, offer the **best** protection available. They are handy for high-risk situations like flights, but you may have trouble being understood when speaking. Note that models with valves will only protect you and will not protect others.
- A mask must fit snugly around your nose and mouth to prevent leaks and provide full protection. Try exhaling forcefully while using your fingers to feel around the edges of your mask for airflow. If your mask doesn't fit well, try a different brand. However, **a poorly-fitting mask is still more protective than no mask at all**.
- The more you can mask, the better, but wearing it only sometimes (e.g. in the highest-risk situations) is still better than never wearing it at all.

Testing and contact tracing

- It takes time between when you are infected and when a test will turn positive. Some people do not test positive until well after symptoms appear.
- Laboratory PCR tests are more likely to detect an infection than at-home rapid tests, but their weakness is the longer turnaround time – your result is always a couple days out-of-date. Keep this in mind when interpreting a lab test.
- A negative test is a **sign** that you may have not been infected, but it is not a **guarantee**. Use it as one signal alongside others: do you have symptoms? Have you been taking risks in the past few days?
- If you have enough tests to do so, test repeatedly, starting from just before the event to a few days after the event.
- If you have health insurance, you are eligible for 8 free/reimbursed tests every month. **Stock up and share!**
- If you test positive, inform everyone you were in contact with immediately. Let them know where you were, if you were masked, and any other details.

Outdoor air, ventilation, and filtration

- **COVID is airborne:** it does not only spread by coughing and sneezing, but fills the air as people exhale. That's why enclosed, indoor spaces with no ventilation are risky: the concentration of COVID particles in the air builds up over time.
- If the weather is good, **spend time outside!** Your chances of transmitting Covid

outdoors on a breezy day are dramatically lower than inside.
- Ventilate indoor spaces by opening windows and using fans to move old air out and fresh air in.
- Filter indoor air with commercial HEPA air purifiers or homemade CR boxes, which are effective at removing COVID particles. Since many hotel rooms don't have windows that open, this may be the best way to make a room safer. (Some people even incorporate RGB computer fans into their homemade units!)
- If you have a CO2 reader, you can use it as a proxy measure of ventilation, since people exhale CO2. Outdoor CO2 is about 400 ppm. Aim for indoor CO2 levels of 800 ppm or less.

Risk tolerance

- Talk honestly about your level of caution and what level of risk you are willing to accept. Respect those with a lower level of risk tolerance and ask what you can do to make them more comfortable.
- Even if you are normally less careful, consider being more careful in the days leading up to the event as a sort of "mini quarantine".
- Here's some examples of how you might talk to your friends about risk:
  - "I'm up-to-date on boosters and am strict about wearing an N95 indoors, and I tested negative last night."
  - "I'm also boosted and I tested negative this morning. I'm not usually that good about masking, but I did it on the plane, and I stayed at home for three days before."
  - "I only got my second shot last month, but we always wear surgical masks at work. I can take a test right now if you have one. Would you feel comfortable doing outdoor dining?"

Scenarios

- **Flights and transit:** Airplanes and airports are cramped, crowded places where you have little to no control over distancing, ventilation, and the actions of others. Trains, buses, and taxis are similar, though you will probably be in contact with fewer people.
- **Dining:** Look for outdoor dining, but beware that finding it can take patience. Also consider picnics or doing takeout/delivery in your room. If others choose to eat indoors, consider just sitting with them, eating beforehand or ordering takeout to have later.
- **Public con spaces:** Look for places with high ceilings and room to spread out.

Remember that wearing your own mask helps encourage others to mask as well.

- **Room parties:** Agree to respect each other and to discuss expectations (vaccines, masks, tests, prior risks). Know who you are with so that you can do contact tracing. If you have them, open windows and use air purifiers.
- **Fursuiting:** Beware that most fursuiters do not mask, as it's hard to fit a mask under there and it's hard enough to breathe already. Still, it can be done with enough practice and dedication. Consider going outside to fursuit or to interact with fursuiters.

Conclusion

- **Layers of protection:** Not everyone is going to be 100% perfect 100% of the time, but every bit of effort we make can help lower the risk and improve the outcome. Having multiple layers of protection means that even if one mitigation fails or is unavailable, another mitigation can fill in the gap. We can't stop every infection, but we can stop some of them, and that's worth doing.
- **Risk assessment:** Try to estimate the risk level in each situation and adjust your mitigations accordingly. You might mask for your flight, but do outdoor dining with your vaccinated friends after you all test that morning. Or, rather, you might mask for your flight *for the purpose of* feeling more comfortable while doing outdoor dining with your friends.
- **Inclusivity:** Furry should be an inclusive place, and everyone deserves to have their health and safety prioritized. COVID can be a difficult topic to talk about, but communicating honestly and respectfully is the best policy for helping everyone feel comfortable. Let's take care of each other so that all of us can be here together.